



**CITY OF COLONIAL HEIGHTS, VIRGINIA
MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

City Hall – 201 James Avenue

Tuesday, September 3, 2019

7:00 p.m.

MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Mr. Hartson called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

II. Roll Call

Present:

Mrs. Schiff

Mrs. Hamilton

Mr. Hartson

Mr. Kohan

Mr. Wade

Mr. Cherry

Absent:

Mr. Kollman

Also Present:

Ms. Hall

Mr. Flippen

Mr. Fisher

III. Determination of Quorum

A quorum was determined.

IV. Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Schiff moved to approve the agenda, and Mr. Cherry seconded with all commissioners in favor.

V. Approval of Minutes for August 6, 2019 meeting

Mrs. Schiff moved to approve the agenda, and Mr. Wade seconded with all commissioners in favor.

VI. Hearing of Citizens Generally

No citizens spoke.

VII. Old Business

A. Appointment of one member onto the Advisory Board of Recreation & Parks

Mr. Hartson asked if anyone would volunteer for the position. Ms. Schiff moved to appoint Mrs. Hamilton and Mr. Wade seconded, with all commissioners in favor.

VIII. New Business/Reports

A. Review Comprehensive Plan Chapters 6 and 7

Chapter 6: Economic Development

As Chapter Six pertains to Economic Development, Karen Epps, Director of Economic Development was present to answer specific questions.

Ms. Schiff asked if this chapter was up to date. Ms. Hall clarified that Chapter 7: Environment was recently updated, but that the data in Chapter Six has not been updated since its initial adoption. She stated that all of the graphs and charts will be reviewed and replaced with new data at the end of the year or be recommended to remain until the next update.

Mr. Hartson asked Ms. Epps whether Colonial Heights has a job training program as referenced in Chapter Six (page 44). Ms. Epps responded that there are numerous job training opportunities. The Crater Regional Workforce Investment Board mostly works with businesses who want to upgrade the skills of their employees, or if they're doing an expansion and need new employees to develop the necessary skillset to perform their job. The City is also a member of the Community College Workforce Alliance in partnership with John Tyler Community College; they offer job training for citizens.

Mr. Kohan asked Ms. Epps whether the Colonial Heights Vocational Technical Center is still active. Ms. Epps stated that it was and that members of the Economic Development Authority were involved in some of the programs offered at the school. Mr. Cherry added that City Council was recently briefed by Colonial Heights High School, who informed them that they were in the process of expanding their programs, focusing on growth in skillsets such as carpentry, HVAC, and even construction and home building. They are hoping to partner with businesses in the community.

Mr. Fisher added that the Colonial Heights School Board is putting renewed emphasis on vocational education. The School Board is very interested in rehabilitation of buildings, particularly in the City. Mr. Smith stated that the vocational program also offers adult education courses, including conversational Spanish.

Mr. Hartson noted the rise of the "gig economy" as a national trend and asked if unemployment insurance covers Independent Contractors, 1099 employees (page 44-45). Mr. Cherry and Mr. Fisher responded it does not.

Mr. Kohan asked for updated charts and data, and asked what the current unemployment rate was, as it was listed at 6% (page 45). Ms. Epps responded that the unemployment rate is now at 3.2%. Ms. Hall verified that updated charts and data would be created and also asked for feedback regarding the type of data they would like to see in the charts, for example, if they would like it to remain divided by gender and age or if they would like other demographics such as income.

Mrs. Schiff asked Ms. Epps how many Colonial Heights residents are participating in the

job training programs for Crater Regional Workforce Investment Board; Ms. Epps responded that she would see if the information is available.

Mr. Hartson and Mr. Kohan agreed that Exhibit 16 was outdated and Mr Hartson continued that Ms. Hall will update the table (page 46).

Mrs. Schiff asked if the Southpark Mall was still doing okay (page 47-48). Mr. Hartson replied that Mr. Smith stated Southpark Mall were doing well in the previous month's Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Hartson asked Ms. Epps if he could share the information she provided him as a part of the Retail Academy training he is scheduled to attend. She confirmed, and they explained that Colonial Heights has negative leakage, which means there is a surplus of retail business in the City.

Mrs. Hamilton commented that while the data states Southpark Mall is still doing well, it doesn't appear that way from the outside, physically.

Mr. Smith clarified that based on the meeting he had with Southpark Mall, that the mall is in the middle, it is not the most successful mall, but it is not suffering.

Mr. Hartson responded that nothing can be done about exterior upkeep if they are not in violation of the code.

Ms. Hall stated that in regards to the exterior appearance she did not believe a change will happen until there is redevelopment on the out parcels. When this redevelopment occurs, the parking lot will be redeveloped, and they will need to come up to code with landscape design if they create a stand-alone parcel. If they decide to do a shopping center development, the parking lot will need to be fully updated. Unfortunately, a large section of the street is private, which is a major hurdle as they aren't required to have the same sidewalks and street trees that Ms. Hall would like to see in redevelopment.

Mr. Hartson described the life cycle of businesses and stated that Southpark Mall is in the mature stage. He referenced Regency Mall and its redevelopment. Colonial Heights needs to attract investors and developers in order to initiate redevelopment.

Mr. Fisher agreed with Mr. Hartson that Southpark Mall is in the mature stage, but he believes there is hope. He stated that the evidence is not only for Regency Square but also Willow Lawn Shopping Center. Willow Lawn has been through four to five renovations and multiple phases since it was built in approximately 1960. It was the first shopping center built in Richmond and is still going strong. Mr. Fisher also mentioned that Southpark Mall had very onerous parking requirements when it was built. The zoning code at the time called for this, now unnecessary, and unused parking. The parking lot doesn't even fill during the holidays, which detracts from the appearance of the mall. He suggested that in redevelopment, the space for parking should be cut down.

Mrs. Schiff stated that she would like to see more curbs and gutters on the Boulevard, particularly between City Hall and Temple Avenue (page 48).

Mr. Hartson asked if that suggestion was in the Capital Improvement Plan. Mr. Flippen replied that Engineering has submitted two separate applications for funding continuing modernization of the Boulevard. They received funding for new pavement. The intention is to put in new sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and lights when they are able to receive funding for it. Colonial Heights has not scored very well with the Virginia Smart Scale system, but

the department is slowly refining and improving to help the score.

Mr. Wade asked, in reference to the previous month's meeting if the funds were unavailable to finish improvement of lighting on the Boulevard.

Mr. Flippen replied that there were enhancement projects north of Lyons Avenue, and that they received funding for the stretch of Boulevard from James to Temple Avenues. However, they were funded for the design, and not the construction of the lighting. VDOT stated if they wanted to proceed the City would have to fund construction or they could cancel the project. The Engineering Department decided to cancel the project.

Mr. Wade asked as there is currently a streetlight every 50 feet in the area that has them, if it would be possible to remove some of those and space them out further along the Boulevard in order to cut costs.

Mr. Flippen stated that could be considered but that because of the expansion of the road and addition of sidewalks that is typically a part of modernization, the lights would have to be relocated if they were in the way of such expansions. The lights are often located on private property and in these projects, they have to acquire right of way in order to expand the roadway. With that in mind, when there is redevelopment on the Boulevard, part of the plan review is to require that they install streetlights and sidewalks associated with their development.

Mr. Hartson asked if we have evidence if deeper lots along the Boulevard would attract development. Mrs. Schiff replied making the lots deeper would cut into the neighborhoods and the neighborhoods need to be protected. Mr. Wade offered another viewpoint; that development of deeper lots could incorporate the Mixed Use Plan, and encroachment into the neighborhoods may be a selling point for homeowners since property could sell for commercial rates.

Ms. Hall stated that a number of parcels on the Boulevard are small and do not meet the minimum standards of development. When redevelopment happens, she anticipates that the Board of Zoning Appeals will see a lot of variances in order for those parcels to be developed, which is a hurdle.

Mr. Hartson asked if anyone has any comments on the section labeled home based businesses (page 48-49). He asked if they were an issue.

Ms. Hall stated that she has had numerous cases of businesses operating at homes in violation of the code. She and the Commissioner of Revenue have therefore decided to move from a small-locality procedure to a large-locality procedure on reviewing and issuing business licenses, to proactively prevent violations. Applications for business licenses that seem questionable are now flagged by staff and sent to the Zoning Administrator for review. Unfortunately, the City does not have the large-locality technology or additional staffing to conduct zoning review on business licenses.

Mr. Hartson asked what the designated districts are for the Commercial Rehabilitation Program (page 49). Mrs. Schiff asked if this program was still in effect. Ms. Epps explained that the two districts are the Boulevard and Southpark districts.

Mr. Wade and Mr. Hartson referred to Map 5 (page 56) and discussed the highlighted areas.

Mr. Wade pointed out the districts in the circled areas on the map. Mr. Hartson asked why the Boulevard Commercial Strategy Area is limited to the stretch from Westover Avenue to the city limits (page 50-56).

Mr. Wade said he believed the previous plan included the area of Westover Avenue at Conduit Avenue as a mixed-use development, which is why that area may have been targeted. However, the lot owners have not sold the land. Mr. Cherry stated that the supposition is that the children of the owner will sell the lot on Conduit Avenue when the owner passes. Mr. Hartson replied that they should keep the Conduit Avenue and Westover Avenue Mixed-Use Center in the Comprehensive Plan if it is believed the land will sell. Ms. Hall added that the land is currently zoned residential and therefore a mix-use development will require a rezoning or a special use permit.

Mr. Hartson stated that he believes the whole stretch of the Boulevard should be included in the strategy area instead of just the southern end (pg. 50).

Ms. Hall stated that if everyone was in agreement she would make notes to expand it in revision. Ms. Schiff asked if Ms. Hall knew why the Boulevard Commercial Strategy was created that way. Ms. Hall replied that she was unsure why the Boulevard Commercial strategy area was targeted. Ms. Schiff suggested that it was focused on the weaker region of the Boulevard as a part of the planned revitalization.

Ms. Hall and Mr. Flippen verified that the Boulevard revitalization has already occurred in that region. Ms. Hall suggested that perhaps the strategy area was to prioritize revitalization of that sub-area first and that has been accomplished.

Mr. Hartson stated that he remembered being part of a committee regarding revitalization of the courthouse area and propositions including coffee shops and law offices.

Ms. Hall stated that it was called the Southern Gateway Land Use Committee and that she was involved when she started working for the City. She stated that the committee was focused on rezoning of Battery Place into RO (Residential Office) to which residents said no, and redevelopment of Dupuy Avenue.

Mr. Fisher recalled that there was supposed to be rezoning in the area, and a special use permit was approved on Chesterfield Avenue for a psychologist's practice.

Mr. Hartson stated that it might be something to add to the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Hall stated that she would at least record the results of the committee in the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Kohan inquired about the Appomattox River Corridor Vision Plan. Ms. Hall stated that there was a study done on the Appomattox River Corridor that suggested a mixed-use development. Unfortunately, since the land was previously a landfill, it has restricted uses and cannot be used for residential or child-related uses. The land was rezoned to industrial. The paragraph in the comprehensive plan may no longer be relevant as a result of rezoning. She asked the Commissioners whether they would like to remove or update the section (Pages 51-52).

Ms. Epps stated that she has been working on the 32 acres that were rezoned industrial. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) is doing a site selection study

working with engineers from Timmons Group and going across the state to do site characterizations on any site larger than 12 acres. They determine if sites already have gas, electric, and water/sewer and rate the sites accordingly. The ideal rating is a tier five site in order to attract businesses that are looking to locate in Virginia. The information for this site will be available at the end of September, which will detail what must be done to make it a tier five site.

Mr. Fisher pointed out the first paragraph of page 51, which references the "recent recession", and suggested that be edited or taken out so as not to date the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Hartson asked if there is a recruitment team of City staff comprised of business owners, local real estate professionals, property owners, lenders, Chamber of Commerce members, and elected officials (page 52). Ms. Schiff stated that Mr. Townes created this committee and that they met quarterly to discuss how they could help each other.

Mr. Hartson asked if it should be removed from the Comprehensive Plan as they no longer meet, or if commissioners would like to see this recruitment team back in place.

Ms. Epps stated that in 2016 the Planning Commission endorsed the Economic Development strategic plan which incorporates much of Chapter 6, but doesn't address any additional committees other than the Economic Development Authority (EDA). She went on to say that the EDA was inactive prior to her appointment as Economic Development Director.

Mr. Hartson agreed that the EDA serves much of the same purpose that the recruitment team was supposed to and that it may be removed from the Comprehensive Plan.

However, Mr. Hartson suggested adding a paragraph about the EDA. Ms. Epps stated that she could provide a summary of its role to Ms. Hall. Mr. Smith suggested that it would fit in the Business Recruitment section on page 52.

Mr. Smith acknowledged Mr. Hartson's previous mention of the upcoming Retail Academy training. Virginia Gateway Region worked to get the City a better rate to participate in the Retail Academy. This program is a customized training, including data analytics, a retail recruitment plan, a marketing guide, analysis of Colonial Heights, and potential prospective businesses.

Mr. Wade proposed incorporating incentives in the Business Retention and Expansion subsection (pg 52), as many of the businesses are over thirty years old, and many stores are closing as a result of online retailers.

Mr. Hartson responded that online companies are now opening brick and mortar stores and would not be hurt by the shallow lots on the Boulevard.

Mr. Wade also mentioned the limited parking on Boulevard lots, and that Temple Avenue in Prince George County is the main competitor.

Mr. Hartson stated that he has heard it's expensive to do business on the Boulevard.

Mr. Fisher stated that before the courthouse was built and the City had to decide what to do with the property, he recalled the Boulevard properties were appraised as high as upscale properties in Short Pump.

Mr. Wade stated that the City needs to be more aggressive in promoting itself as a business community (page 53). He went on to say that he would like to see Colonial Heights as the hub of the tri-city area for business.

Mr. Hartson expressed his desire for Colonial Heights to have an office park, as retail positions don't provide higher salaries, and an office park would provide for that higher income.

Mrs. Schiff asked if the EDA works on developing the business identity for the City (Page 53).

Mr. Smith stated that he is working with a graphic designer to develop a new city logo in supplement to the seal. They also have a staff committee reviewing the designs. Once it is refined it will be brought to City Council, the EDA, and Planning Commission. A new logo will help build a new image for the City. The City website is also being refreshed in 2020, so the new logo and a new theme will be included.

Mr. Wade mentioned that at the last EDA meeting, members passed a motion to present the consideration of a separate website for the EDA.

Mr. Smith stated that he had spoken with Ms. Epps about it.

Mr. Hartson asked what the letters, "EP-6, EP-1, SD-2", in parentheses at the end of the bullet points meant (Page 54). Ms. Hall explained that when the public vision was put in, these referenced vision goals in Chapter 2, EP stands for Economic Prosperity, SD for Sustainable Development, and the numbers refer to the objectives (page 13). She also stated the Economic Development Strategy section (page 53) needs to be updated to reflect the adopted Economic Development Plan.

Mr. Fisher recommended that Ms. Hall and Ms. Epps work together to revise and update the section.

Ms. Hall recommended that Planning Commission go through each of the goals in bullet points (page 54-55), and determine if they are still relevant.

Mr. Kohan referred to the first bullet point regarding medical complexes and stated that the taxes are higher in Colonial Heights than Prince George and Chesterfield Counties which deters medical parks and professional businesses from developing in the City.

Mr. Hartson asked if the City has achieved the one-stop shop for permits and whether that second bullet point is still necessary. Ms. Hall stated that Planning and Building Inspections is a one-stop shop, and businesses only need to travel as far as across the hall for a business license, or upstairs to the Economic Development department. Mr. Hartson stated that as it is all in one building, that may be considered a one-stop shop.

Mr. Hartson stated that the third bullet point addresses Mr. Kohan's earlier statement about the tax rate in Colonial Heights. He asked whether the City offers tax credits for businesses.

Mr. Cherry replied that it has been done when appropriate, the latest example being the new Extended Stay America behind Sedona Taphouse.

Mr. Hartson asserted that he believes the EDA fulfills the role of "City program to attract

new business and retain existing business” in the fourth bullet point. He stated it should be revised to maintain the program through the EDA. Ms. Hall stated that when the update is made, the goal is not deleted, it is marked as complete so that citizens may see the progress.

Mr. Kohan suggested the earlier discussion of the Vocational School falls in line with bullet point five as the school is hoping to partner with local businesses.

Mr. Smith stated that it is also reflected in the economic development plan. He cited an example of resulting entrepreneurship involving a high school student who grew sprouts for local restaurants.

Mr. Fisher stated that the sixth bullet point should be removed if it is not being done.

Ms. Epps commented in regards to bullet point seven that a lot of training and development of entrepreneurship is being done through the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Crater Small Business Development Center, Crater Planning District, John Tyler Community College, and the Office of Economic Development. She stated that they come together and create the programs and offer them for entrepreneurs to get their businesses started. They bring current business owners in to provide services. She also stated that she is collaborating with surrounding localities to create a strategy to pool resources together for seminars and other educational opportunities.

Mr. Hartson replied that this bullet could be re-worded to demonstrate what is currently being done.

Chapter 7: Environment

Mr. Hartson stated that as much of this chapter is mandated by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), he did not have many comments on it.

Ms. Schiff stated that she did not know enough about it to have significant commentary.

Ms. Hall explained to Planning Commission that Chapter Seven was recently updated, to comply with DEQ requirements. She brought their attention to Map 11 (page 89). It is an older paper map from 1997, as the DEQ did not approve the digital map created in GIS. In order to complete the audit, she had to photoshop in the Conjurer's Neck subdivision on top of the 1997 paper map. She does not have funding to have a digital map made so this paper map is what she must use to determine if a property is in the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area and it is difficult to read and navigate. In order to have a digital map made, an environmental surveyor would need to be hired to create an updated Resource Management Area map in GIS.

Mr. Smith stated that the IT director put some money in the budget this year for a GIS consultant and that part of the budget could go into this mapping.

Ms. Hall explained that the Resource Management Area map would need to be created by

an environmental surveyor specifically, and that the regular GIS consultant would not be able to perform the task. She stated that as Colonial Heights is a very environmental locality, once things are up to digital standards in planning, her goal is to have an environmental education program.

Mr. Hartson asked why the map said "Comprehensive Plan 2044". Ms. Hall explained that the plan goes until 2044, which is the projected year all goals should be accomplished.

Mr. Fisher stated he discovered a few typos within Chapter Seven that he would point out to Ms. Hall as well as missing sentences on pages 83 and 84. There is also a mistake on page 85, the "A" in CVWMA stands for Authority and not Agency.

Mr. Fisher also proposed including encouraging the use of electric vehicles in the goals on page 87.

Mr. Hartson responded that solar panels should also be included.

Ms. Hamilton recalled a discussion of electric vehicles in the past, and suggested including a charging station as a goal.

Mr. Hartson stated that he did not see a section in Chapter Seven about protection of wildlife and asked Ms. Hall if there was anything regarding endangered species or wildlife protection in the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Hall stated that there is nothing in the plan about the Endangered Species Act, and that the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area covers most sensitive land in the locality.

Mr. Hartson asked if there was a law protecting the habitats of geese. Mr. Cherry responded that it was quite the opposite and that Virginia has an early hunting season targeting geese overpopulation. Mrs. Schiff stated that she also heard Conjurer's Neck was having a bow-hunting deer hunt. Mr. Cherry replied that they already have a bow-hunting plan in place. They have contracted with a local hunting club to provide rights in the common areas throughout Conjurer's Neck. The Urban Archery season runs from the first weekend of September to the end of March and allows for the hunting of antlerless deer to curb the population. This hunt has been put in place as a result of a rise in deer-car collisions.

Mrs. Hamilton informed Planning Commission of her experience with a couch which was placed in a city right of way in her neighborhood. She explained that she informed Code Enforcement, who was unaware that it was on the public right of way, treated the case as Exterior Storage of Interior Objects on Private Property, which delayed the City's ability to have the couch removed. She expressed her frustrations as it took a month for the couch to be removed and wondered whether there was anything to be done to help expedite the governmental processes and change the processes.

Reports

1. **Chairman**—Mr. Hartson reported on the Adjacent Localities Communication and Coordination Committee (ALCCC). Mrs. Schiff attended the March meeting, and offered that Colonial Heights host a meeting in September. Mr. Hartson and Mrs. Schiff sent out an invitation for a meeting on Monday, September 9. The day of this Planning Commission Meeting, September 3rd, was the deadline to respond. As of that evening, only one person had replied that they would attend. It was determined that the meeting would not be held. As they only received two responses, Mr. Hartson was unclear whether there was interest in continuing to pursue involvement with this

Committee. Ms. Hall stated that she had not heard from the chairman of the ALCCC upon inquiry. Mrs. Schiff stated that she initially attended because no one from Colonial Heights had been to previous meetings.

2. **Director of Planning and Community Development** – Ms. Hall informed Planning Commission that the Residential Rehabilitation Tax Abatement Pamphlet was completed and sent to the printer and will be available at the Planning Office for distribution soon. Mrs. Hamilton suggested getting the brochure out during National Night Out.

Ms. Hall also mentioned that there would be two applications on the next meeting's agenda. Tussing Elementary has applied for a special use permit to have an electronic message board, and a rezoning application was submitted for a parcel on Pickwick Avenue that is requesting to be rezoned to Boulevard Business from Residential Office, as they would like to convert an old church.

3. **City Engineer or Designee – Asst. Director of Public Works** – Mr. Flippen updated Planning Commission on the status of the Ashland-Petersburg trail. A public input meeting is planned for October. Mr. Kohan asked whether there was a contract for restrooms at White Bank Park. Mr. Smith responded that Recreation and Parks reported that site work is under way and it should be moving forward soon.

4. **Others, as necessary or appropriate**


- a. **City Manager** – Mr. Smith stated that city council approved a three-year lease with the Coastal Plains Baseball League beginning May 2020. He mentioned there has already been good press coverage, and that there will be a naming contest for the team. He was very excited for the opportunity and the resulting community engagement.

- b. **City Attorney** – Mr. Fisher reported that after much time and negotiation, a new franchise agreement with Columbia Gas is being made, effective for 20 years. The next agreements they are looking to negotiate are with Verizon and Dominion. These are all potential non-exclusive agreements so there can be competition.

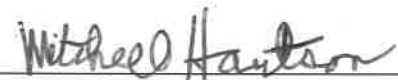
IX. **Adjournment**

Mr. Cherry moved to adjourn the meeting and Mrs. Schiff seconded with all commissioners in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 p.m.



Kelly Hall
Secretary



Mitchell Hartson
Chairman